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2001HANOI00313 - CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DOT-00	SRPP-00
	DS-00	EB-00	FAAE-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00
	IO-00	VCE-00	NSAE-00	OIC-02	SS-00	DSCC-00	PRM-01
	DRL-02	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/005W			
				-----C36025	091055Z	/38	

FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1935
INFO NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
APEC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
SECDEF WASHDC
JOINT STAFF WASHDC
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI//J5/FPA//
DIA WASHDC
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 HANOI 000313

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL, PRM, INR
NSC FOR EAST ASIAN DIRECTORATE
SECDEF FOR ISA/EAP STERN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/9/2011

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SUBJECT: LARGE-SCALE PROTESTS END IN CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, 20 DEMONSTRATORS ARRESTED

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REF: A) HANOI 247 AND PREVIOUS
B) 00 HO CHI MINH CITY 1110
C) 00 HO CHI MINH CITY 563 AND PREVIOUS

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY ACTING DCM ROBERT DRY;
REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

2. (C) SUMMARY: REPORTS FROM THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS PROVINCES OF GIA LAI AND DAKLAK SUGGEST LARGE-SCALE DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE ENDED FOLLOWING THE ARRESTS OF AT LEAST 20 PROTESTERS. THOUSANDS OF VIETNAM'S ETHNIC MINORITIES PROTESTED THIS PAST WEEK IN FRONT OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNIST PARTY BUILDINGS IN PROVINCIAL CAPITALS. INJURIES, BUT NO DEATHS, HAVE BEEN REPORTED AS SECURITY FORCES HAVE ACTED TO STEM THE ARREST. THE MFA DESCRIBED THOSE ARRESTED AS "PROVOCATIVE PEOPLE" WHO DESTROYED PROPERTY AND CAUSED INSTABILITY, BUT THE ROOTS OF THE PROTESTS ARE VARIED. THE PROTESTS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN TRIGGERED MOST DIRECTLY BY THE ARREST JANUARY 29 OF TWO ETHNIC MINORITY MEN WHO APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN LEADERS IN PROTESTANT HOUSE CHURCHES IN THE REGION. THE TWO MEN WERE PROMPTLY RELEASED AFTER SIGNING A STATEMENT BEFORE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES. HOWEVER, TENSION HAS BEEN BUILDING FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS: SMOLDERING RESENTMENT BY MINORITIES OVER LARGE-SCALE ETHNIC VIETNAMESE MIGRATION INTO THE AREA; SUBSEQUENT LOSS OF THEIR TRADITIONAL LAND TO THE MIGRANTS; AND THE EXTREME IMPOVERISHMENT OF MINORITIES, WHICH HAS BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE DROP OF COFFEE PRICES TO A THIRD OF THEIR PREVIOUS VALUE.

3. (C) SUMMARY (CONT'D): THE DEMONSTRATIONS ARE THE LARGEST
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IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS IN MEMORY AND COME AT A TIME WHEN FARMERS IN OTHER AREAS OF THE COUNTRY ARE VOICING GRIEVANCES RELATED TO LAND ISSUES. IT IS UNLIKELY THE UNREST OCCURRING IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS WILL FAN OUT TO OTHER PROVINCES, HOWEVER, BECAUSE THE ISSUES SPURRING THE DEMONSTRATORS ARE UNIQUE TO THIS REGION. THE DEMONSTRATIONS COME AT A SENSITIVE TIME FOR VIETNAMESE OFFICIALDOM, WEEKS BEFORE THE NINTH COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS, WHEN JOCKEYING OVER LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AND THE PARTY PLATFORM IS AT A FEVER PITCH. END SUMMARY.

LARGE-SCALE DEMONSTRATIONS APPEAR TO HAVE ENDED

4. (U) THE DEMONSTRATIONS BEGAN IN PLEIKU, CAPITAL OF GIA LAI PROVINCE, ON FEBRUARY 2. RESIDENTS OF THE TOWN TOLD FOREIGN JOURNALISTS THAT THREE TO FOUR THOUSAND PEOPLE, ALL MEMBERS OF INDIGENOUS MINORITY GROUPS, MARCHED IN WELL-

ORGANIZED GROUPS ALONG ROADS LEADING INTO PLEIKU. "THE MOOD OF THE DEMONSTRATION WAS STRIKINGLY PEACEFUL," ACCORDING TO A BUSINESSMAN WHO WITNESSED THE EVENT. ON THE FOLLOWING DAY, AND FOR THE NEXT TWO DAYS, OCCASIONAL VIOLENCE MARRED THE DEMONSTRATIONS, AND SEVERAL POLICEMEN AND PROTESTORS WERE INJURED IN CLASHES, ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS.

15. (U) ACCORDING TO A REPORT BY THE STATE-RUN VIETNAM NEW AGENCY, THE DEMONSTRATIONS WERE PROVOKED BY "BAD ELEMENTS" AND "EXTREMISTS" WHO WHIPPED UP POPULAR MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THE ARREST OF TWO ETHNIC MINORITY MEN ON JANUARY 29. THE VNA REPORT SAID THE PROTESTS BEGAN IN PLEIKU WHEN LARGE
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NUMBERS OF PEOPLE GATHERED TO DEMAND THE RELEASE OF THE TWO MEN. VNA SAID THE TWO WERE RELEASED IMMEDIATELY AFTER "SIGNING A PROTOCOL CONFIRMING THEIR ILLEGAL BEHAVIOR AND ASKING FOR LENIENCY."

16. (U) ON FEBRUARY 6, THE DEMONSTRATIONS MOVED SOUTHWARD TO NEIGHBORING DAKLAK PROVINCE AND ITS CAPITAL CITY BUON ME THUOT, ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS. UP TO TWO THOUSAND PROTESTORS TOOK PART IN THESE DEMONSTRATIONS, WHICH TOOK ON A MORE VIOLENT CHARACTER. PROTEST